

Talking to Your Adolescent About Sexual Abuse

- Situations:** Teens are exploited, taken advantage of, and sexually abused in everyday situations: dating, at friends' houses, partying, breaking rules, going to school and job hunting. They can be taken advantage of and trapped because of:
 - fear of getting into trouble.
 - lack of information about sexuality.
 - their own needs, along with outside pressure, to enter the world of love and romance.
 - the sheer number of new people in their lives.
 - trust of others and willingness to think they have misunderstood another's intention.
 - The belief that if they are good, good things will happen to them; if bad things happen, they must have deserved them.
- Types of Force:** Teens may well have heard that sexual abuse is a violent, rather than a sexual crime. But teens are more likely to encounter sexual abuse in situations of sexual bargaining than in interactions that appear to them to be violent. They are most likely to encounter verbal or peer pressure, rather than violent physical force. The force used might also be blackmail, a bribe, or they might be made to feel that the abuse is their fault.
- Who are the Victims:** Unfortunately, it is estimated that 1 out of 4 girls and 1 out of 6 boys will experience a sexual assault before the age of 18. This is true for all races and socio-economic groups. The most difficult thing about sexual abuse for teens to understand is that it could happen to them or someone they know. Teens feel safe by staying away from "strangers" and are convinced that they are safe with people they know and trust, particularly their peers.
- Who are the Offenders:** Although most offenders of adolescent sexual assaults are male, women also commit some assaults. Adolescents are also offenders. Someone the victim knows and trusts commits nearly all of the reported assaults. Common offenders are a friend, a date, a neighbor, a cousin, an uncle, an older brother of a friend, or another student. They may be successful, charming, and well liked.
- Initiate discussions:** Adolescents are more likely to participate in a discussion if they are being asked about their ideas and opinions, rather than being told what to think or do. Parents can share experiences that they have had -- anything from hearing a sexually harassing joke or seeing abusive advertising to being victimized as a child or adolescent. A discussion, not a lecture, of a news event will often help adolescents discuss the topic.

6. **Remember not to be victim-blaming and to listen as much as you speak.** If you do not know the answer to a question, say so, and tell them you will find the answer. You can always call Day One at 401-421-4100 and we can help answer your questions, and those of your child.